

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 2471

As Reported by House Committee On: Judiciary

Title: An act relating to the criminal background check and other requirements applicable to the purchase and transfer of firearms.

Brief Description: Concerning criminal background checks and other requirements applicable to the purchase and transfer of firearms.

Sponsors: Representatives Goodman, Chandler, Blake, Shea, Takko, McCune and Upthegrove.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Judiciary: 1/25/12, 1/30/12 [DP].

Brief Summary of Bill

- Revises background check and other requirements applicable to the purchase and transfer of a pistol.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON JUDICIARY

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 13 members: Representatives Pedersen, Chair; Goodman, Vice Chair; Rodne, Ranking Minority Member; Shea, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Chandler, Eddy, Hansen, Kirby, Klippert, Nealey, Orwall, Rivers and Roberts.

Staff: Edie Adams (786-7180).

Background:

Both state and federal law regulate the possession, purchase, and transfer of pistols. Firearms dealers must be licensed under both federal and state law and must comply with federal and state law when making firearms transfers.

Federal Law.

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

Under the federal Brady Act, a dealer must, with few exceptions, conduct a background check to determine whether the purchaser is prohibited from possessing a firearm. This background check is conducted through the National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS). The NICS check includes a check of three major databases: the National Crime Information Center; the Interstate Identification Index; and the NICS Index. If the purchaser is not a United States citizen, the NICS check will include a check of the Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement records.

The dealer may initiate the NICS check either by contacting the Federal Bureau of Investigation or a state "point of contact" agency. In Washington, local sheriffs and police departments serve as "partial points of contact" for licensed dealers in conducting the NICS check. This means that a licensed firearm dealer will contact the local sheriff or police department to conduct the NICS check for all pistol transfers where the purchaser does not have a valid concealed pistol license (CPL). However, if the purchaser has a valid CPL, the dealer will conduct the NICS check, and local law enforcement will conduct the state background check.

State Law.

Under state law, a dealer may not deliver a pistol to a prospective purchaser until one of the following occurs:

- the purchaser produces a valid CPL;
- the dealer is notified by the chief of police or sheriff that the purchaser is eligible to possess the firearm and the application is approved; or
- five business days have elapsed since the application was received by the law enforcement agency (or up to 60 days if the person does not have a Washington driver's license or has not resided in the state for the previous 90 days).

A dealer must deliver the pistol to the purchaser following the specified time periods unless the law enforcement agency has notified the dealer of an investigative hold.

The statute's provisions governing required background checks do not reflect the practice used by dealers and local law enforcement agencies serving as partial points of contact. One provision requires local law enforcement agencies, in determining whether a person is eligible to possess a firearm, to conduct a background check with the National Crime Information Center, the Washington State Patrol database, the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) database, or other agencies or resources as appropriate. Another provision requires dealers to use the NICS system to conduct background checks of applicants to purchase firearms, and local law enforcement to continue to check the DSHS database, or other agencies or resources as appropriate.

2011 CPL Legislation.

Federal law generally requires dealers to conduct background checks of all purchasers of firearms. There is an exception to this requirement where the purchaser possesses a state permit qualified by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (BATFE) as an alternative to the point-of-transfer background check ("NICS alternative"). Prior to 2011,

a Washington CPL did not meet the federal requirements necessary to qualify as a NICS alternative.

Legislation enacted in 2011 (Substitute House Bill 1923) altered the requirements for the issuance of a CPL. This legislation took effect on July 22, 2011, and as a result of these changes, the BATFE has determined that a Washington CPL issued on or after that date is a qualifying state permit, or NICS alternative. This means that dealers are no longer required under federal law to conduct a background check of a purchaser who possesses a valid Washington CPL issued on or after July 22, 2011. However, state firearms laws continue to require a dealer to conduct a background check of all persons who purchase a pistol from a licensed firearms dealer.

Summary of Bill:

Background check and other requirements relating to the purchase and transfer of a pistol are revised.

A background check is no longer required for a pistol purchase if the purchaser produces a valid CPL issued on or after July 22, 2011.

A dealer must continue to conduct a NICS check of any purchaser who produces a valid CPL issued before July 22, 2011, but the requirement that local law enforcement conduct a state background check in this circumstance is eliminated.

For purchasers who do not produce a valid CPL, the local law enforcement agency must conduct a NICS check and a state background check.

The requirement that a dealer must transfer a pistol to a purchaser after the specified time period (five days or 60 days), unless there are grounds for an investigative hold, applies only with respect to purchasers who are subject to the five-day or 60-day time period.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) None.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: None.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.